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THE BROTHERS.

A TRUE STORY.

The cold Christmas moon was shining on the sleeping village of Cheriton. It lit up the long, straggling street, and made every object almost as distinctly visible as at noon-day. But in the spiritual light they appeared very different. A beautiful quietude, solemn, yet serene, seemed to rest on all things. The quaint houses, with their high roofs, and oddly-clustered chimneys, looked as if they brooded over the recollection of the long past times they had known; and the grand old church looked doubly reverend, with the frost work glittering about its Norman-arched windows, and on the boughs of the huge cedar which towered beside the doorway. The moonbeams lingered lovingly about the grey walls, they fell, too, on the white gravestones in the churchyard, and made each one shine as with a still, calm smile—happy and holy. It was a night upon which thoughtful men might gaze, and feel rising in their hearts simultaneous hope for earth and aspiration to heaven.

Very quiet was the place, as the moon went on her way, looking down with her clear, chill lustre of gaze. And there was one house, isolated from the others by a somewhat extensive domain of shrubbery and garden, about which the moonlight seemed to play as if in curiosity. It was a primitive, old-fashioned abode; window-shutters and blinds were few, save to the lower rooms, and the moonbeams penetrated unhindered into the chambers, and played fantastic tricks upon the walls and floors. Into one little room the elfish rays darted on a sudden, as the moon, rising higher in the heavens, escaped the shadow of a projecting buttress in the wall; and the pale light fell full upon a little white draped bed, wherein lay two young boys. One, the eldest by some years, was asleep, and the quivering light fell on his face—a face every lineament of which was so full of nervous energy, that even in sleep it did not wear an expression of repose. His brother's pale, delicate features were, on the contrary, distinguished by a sort of sculptural calm. He had a high, straight, thoughtful brow, and that sensitive mouth, which to the most masculine face always add and an almost womanlike sweetness of expression.

The two boys seemed apt illustrations of two differently constituted beings. The one all action, the other all thought; if the life of the first might be a picture that of the second would be a poem.

The younger brother was awake. His eyes of dark, deep, liquid hazel were thoughtfully fixed upon the sleeping face beside him and now again, as with a tender impulse, his hands gently put aside the clustering brown curls from the broad forehead of the sleeper. Presently he drew back the white curtain, and looked out at the quiet, homely scene stretched out in the moonlight—at the foreground of trees, leafless, but clothed in a fairy robe of rime, and (in the far distance, strangely clear that night) the wide wonder of the silent sea. He looked—his face lit up—glowed with a nameless rapture. Unuttered prayers swelled in the young heart—instinctive hopes—blessed beliefs rose unbidden to his mind.

And even while he thus gazed, and felt and pondered in the stillness of that wintry midnight, the stillness was broken. Vibrating on the frosty air came solemn strains of music, played with untaught skill on two or three old-fashioned instruments. It was an ancient English air, with a kind of patriarchal simplicity in its character, half carol, half hymn, which harmonized well with the place and the time. As the very voice of the quaint and peaceful village came the clear, sweet sounds, blending like a visible actuality with the wintry stars dotting the dark sky, with the snow-covered roofs, and walls, and trees, and with the pure, passionless moonlight shining over them all.

"Laurence, wake! Listen to the waits!"

It was some time before the subdued voice and the gentle touch disturbed the sleeper from his dreams. When at last he was aroused, he started up suddenly, crying aloud—

"Who calls? Oh, Willie, is it you?" he added in a sleepy tone. "What did you wake me for? 'Tisn't morning!"

"Hush! speak low! Don't you hear the music?"

There was a pause. The two boys listened in silence.

"It's old Giles Headforth with his violoncello," at length broke in Laurence, "and John Read with his cracked hautboy and little ——"

"Ah, don't!" cried the younger boy, with a gesture almost of pain; "never mind *who* plays. It sounds so solemn now, so ——"

His words died away in the intentness of his listening.

"Queer old tune, isn't it?" presently said Laurence, "and queer old figures they look, I'll be bound, standing in the street, with red noses, and frozen eyelashes, and muffled in worsted comforters up to the chin."

He laughed, and then yawned.

"I think I shall go to sleep again. These fellows don't seem inclined to leave off. I shall be tired of listening before they are of playing, I expect."

"Keep awake a little longer, Laureace, dear," pleaded the other. "It's only for one night, and 'tis so nice for us to hear the music, and look out upon the moonlight *together*."

"Very well, Willie," assented the elder boy, nipping a fresh yawn in the bud, "anything to please you, old fellow."

"There—put your arm around me—*so*," pursued Willie, always in the same hushed whispering tone, "and let me lean my head upon your shoulder. Now, that is pleasant. We love each other; don't we, Laurence?"

And the tender, childish face looked upward, askingly,

"I should think so—slightly! You're a dear old chap, Will, though you *have* rather odd, old fashioned notions."

He stooped down, and pressed a hearty kiss on his young brother's delicate face.

And then the two boys remained silent, watching the flickering moon-rays, and listening to the simple music without.

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There are some recollections, oftentimes trivial enough in themselves, which yet remain impressed upon the mind through a whole life, outlasting the memory of events far more striking, and more recent in their occurrence.

Laurence and William Carr grew to be men, went out into the world, and were battlers for fortune; and one of them, alas! in fighting that hard fight became hardened in nature, so that scarce a trait remained of the generous, loving boy of yore. His soul was chilled in the stony routine of that life which is so scrupulously practical—one might almost say, material—the life of a London merchant, devoted, heart and soul to his calling, and to the ambitions of his class. His old instincts were almost dead within him, his old aspirations, his boyish predilections were crushed out, effaced, as though they had never been. And yet, the cold, hard, money getting man of the world never lost the vivid remembrance of that Christmas night, years and years ago, when his little brother lay with his head leaning on his shoulder, and they listened together to the village waits.

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The brothers were separated now—worse, they were estranged. The world came between them, and stifled the frank, free love which each, though in so widely different a way, had felt for the other, ever since the childish days when they had played together about the old house at Cheriton, and prayed, night and morning, at their mother's knee.

The two boys were left orphans before William was twenty years old, and with but little with which to begin life. Laurence's desires had been all for a life of change, adventure, and travel; but instead, he was compelled to take the only opening which offered to him; and, before his father's death, was established in the counting house of a wealthy relative. He soon learned contentment with his fate. To pursue an object, be it fame, or power, or wealth, seems an inherent instinct in man's nature. It fills his energies, satisfies his restlessness, and insensibly, but gratefully, ministers to that vague yearning for dominion which is the inevitable birthright of every man since the beginning of the world. Laurence, shut out from worthier aspirations, found his ambition run high—to be *great* in the sense by which all those around him understood greatness. He would be rich. He would work his way to fortune, to position, to influence. Keeping that goal ever in view, he would struggle through every difficulty, force his way over every obstacle, but he would gain it at last. So he said to himself, silently, many times, during the weary time of probation, when obscurity and hard work appeared to be his allotted portion then and always. But this dark period did not last long; it was not likely that it should continue. He had talents, quickness, vigor, untiring perseverance, and unfailing health. His progress was rapid. He climbed the hill with foot-steps swift as they were sure, and when his father died the old man felt easy on the score of his eldest son's prospects and ultimate success.

But meanwhile William had remained at home, pursuing his self-imposed and dearly-loved studies; reading, thinking, dreaming his hours away in perfect happiness.

From this content he was rudely aroused to the dread realities of death and poverty. The pleasant home and the familiar faces which made it so dear, seemed to slide from him, and left him standing alone in the bleak world, which was so new and strange; like one who, reared in Arcadia, is on a sudden thurst into the midst of the fierce turmoil of a battle.

He sought his brother—but the two natures, always different, were doubly so now, when a life of active business had hardened the one, rendering it more than ever stern and uncompromising; while years of quiet retirement had made the other yet more refined, more visionary, more sensitive. And from Laurence, the younger brother met with no sympathy in all those innermost feelings of his soul; the closest, dearest portion of himself. There was in William Carr that inexplicable, intangible *somewhat*, which marks one man among his fellows—the poet—even though he be dumb to his life's end.

The man of business shrugged his shoulders, knitted his brows at "William's strange fancies." He did not comprehend—he did not care to do so, it seemed. The first step towards their estrangement was taken when William declined, gently and thankfully, but decisively, a situation in the same house where Laurence was now high in trust.

"It is of no use, brother, it would not be right to accept it. I am not fit for such a responsibility. It would be a wrong to my employers to burden them with my incapacity."

"You will improve. You may leave them to protect their own interests, believe me."

William shook his head.

And in brief, the elder brother found the delicate looking youth immutable in his decisions, and left him, with words of impatience and anger on his lips.

His heart reproached him for it afterwards. He was not at all encrusted as yet with the ossification of worldiness. The next day he again went to his brother's lodgings. But William was no longer there—he had left London, they told him; and it was not till he reached his own home that he received a letter of explanation:

"DEAR LAURENCE: I thought it best to go. Forgive me if you think it wrong. I am not able to struggle with the fierce multitude of money getters in this dreary London. My old master, Dr. K——, has offered me a situation as classical tutor in his school. I have accepted it. It is the best thing I see to do. So farewell. Ever yours, WILLIAM."

"And *my* brother will be the paltry usher in a country school!" muttered Laurence as he crushed the letter in his hand. "Gone, too, without consulting me, his elder, his natural adviser. It is badly done."

And so the cloud between the brothers grew dark and palpable. They occasionally corresponded; but each succeeding letter, instead of drawing them nearer together, seemed only to widen the gap. They did not understand one another. Besides, Laurence was becoming a rich man, and become partner in the house where once he was a clerk; while William still remained poor and obscure, with no prospect of his circumstances improving. And when the breach between two brothers or friends once exists, difference of worldly position fatally, icily increases it.

Laurence married brilliantly, choosing his wife from a noble but impoverished family, who were glad enough to ally their aristocratic poverty with his wealth, merchant and plebeian though he was. It was while on his wedding tour, with his handsome but somewhat *passee* bride, that he received a letter from his brother, forwarded to him from London.

"From William—my brother," he remarked, explanatorily, as he opened it; "in answer, I presume, to the announcement of my marriage."

The frigidly high-bred lady responded by a slight bend of her long neck, and busied herself with her chocolate and muffins, while her husband perused the letter. When he had finished, he refolded it carefully, and placed it in his pocket, then turned in silence to his breakfast. His wife never noticed any peculiarity in his manner; she was one of those by whom it is seldom considered good *ton* to be observant of other people's emotions, even a husband's. Lady Henrietta Carr was scrupulous in her attention to such points of etiquette. One more loving than she was, might possibly have divined how much was concealed under the pale face, the bent brow, and the remarkably quiet voice of Laurence Carr that morning. One more tender might even have drawn the secret disturbance forth, and pleaded the cause of the absent offender, instead of leaving the wrath to ferment hiddenly in the stern man's breast.

"I will never forgive him—never, never! I will never look upon his face again. I will never give him help—we are strangers from this hour. Let him travel his own road—and starve."

These hard, terrible words the brother passionately uttered, as he trod the room to and fro, when he was alone, and after again reading the letter.

"DEAR BROTHER LAURENCE" (it ran)—"Your letter, with its brief announcement of your marriage, gave me great pleasure, not only for the sake of its intelligence, but because in the kindly manner in which you conveyed it to me. Perhaps, brother, it is an equal reproach to both of us, that the cordiality was strange as well as pleasant. Let us be friends again, in heart as in name; we were so once—but it is a long while ago. In our new happiness we may surely drown all past offences. For I also am married—not to a peer's daughter; no Laurence, with you alone will rest all the brilliances and grandeur of life; I only ask for a little quiet—I am easily content. *My* wife you may remember; we all knew her when we were boys at school—Mary Elliott, who, though her father was a village tradesman, has had the education, and innately possesses the refinement of any lady in the land. I have loved her, and she me, for six years. She is an orphan, too, and has been a governess all that time. We are rich enough to commence house-keeping, though on a modest scale. We are happy; I pray that you may be the same with my new sister, to whom I beg to offer my affectionate regards. Mary also joins me in the same to yourself my dear brother. And believe me ever yours faithfully,

WILLIAM CARR."

"The daughter of a country shop-keeper and the daughter of the Earl of Tynford to call each other sisters! And he has done this. He will repent it; he must, he shall. He is a disgrace, a shame to me. He might have been an aid—he might have helped my plans. But, now, to marry *thus!*"

Such were some of Laurence's disjointed exclamations, as he tore the letter in pieces, and flung them into the fire. Then he joined his bridge. In the course of the day he informed her that his brother had irremediably offended him, and that he would never speak to him or see him more. Lady Henrietta elevated her handsome eyebrows in a momentary amazement, then restored her features to their habitual expressional composure, and without any remark, suffered her husband to turn the conversation.

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Time passed on. The wealth of Laurence Carr increased yearly; his name grew glorious in the ears of business men. His house was a palace; his wife was jeweled like a queen. He himself still burrowed daily in dusty city holes, whence all his riches seemed to spring; and every year he became harder and more impassible, and more devoted to the one end and aim of his life—money-getting.

It was his sole ambition—he had no hope, no joy beyond. There was no happiness in his gorgeous home, no tenderness in his majestic and aristocratic wife. No one who looked on him would have imagined that he felt the want of love; that there was any remnant of the generous, warm-hearted boy's nature still lingering in the old grim merchant—old before his time, but hard, and cold, and piercing as a steel poignard yet. But it was so. There were moments when his thoughts wandered at their own will—when he *remembered*. The face of his mother shone on him sometimes; and then would come a flash of memory—of the old childish days. And ah, so strange! the childish feelings of those days. And his two children. The boy he often pictured to himself as born to continue the greatness of his family—as enjoying, like a prince, the wealth and luxury he had labored to acquire. And the fair, gentle girl, whose progress to womanhood he had followed in his thoughts; whose birth softened his harsh heart to absolute tenderness. She it was who would cling to him lovingly in after years—whose soft lips would press upon the wrinkles of his worn face—whose gentle voice would always have the power to win him out of his harder, sterner self. If either of his children had lived, Laurence Carr might have been a different man; but both these blessings which he had prayed for—dreamed of as the solace and delight of his old age—were only granted to him for a brief space, and then left his sight forever.

The blow rent his heart solely. It was so deep a grief, even, that at first he forgot the check to his ambition it involved. No son of his would carry his name into future ages—no descendants of his were destined to make illustrious the plebian family *he* had first raised from obscurity. When this remembrance came, it added to his affliction a something that was cold, stony, and almost defiant. Bereaved love mourns; but blighted ambition erects its head in very impotence of pride against the hand that chastises. Laurence's heart grew hardened. He buried himself anew in his grim pursuits; they seemed the be all and end-all of his existence now. He said to himself that it was enough; he would make it enough.

Yet, spite of all his inward protestations, he looked enviously, and sometimes with a feeling less selfish than envy, at the happy parents of blooming children. He would have given well nigh all his hard-won wealth for one such boon as was so freely granted to many. Against his will, he often found himself musing thus, sorrowfully, yearningly. He would awake himself with stern resolve; the one-half of his nature would shrink into itself, while the other looked on with a sardonic kind of piety.

Yet again and again came these softening reveries. It was in the midst of one of them, in the twilight of a December evening, that he was roused by receiving a letter from William.

It was the first time since many years, during which the stern elder brother had suspended all intercourse, and had never sought to know what had become of the other. He had known somewhat, however; for William had come to London, and had commenced the new life of authorship, and Laurence had occasionally met his name in passing periodicals. But direct communication between the two had altogether ceased. He frowned as he recognized the hand.

Perhaps, had this letter come at any other time, he might have returned it unopened. Oh, men! ye who pray, pray for your fellow-men, *whose hearts are hardened*. Oh, angels! plead for them, strive for them; for verily if there be a place in all His works where God does not dwell, and where no saving spark of divinity can linger, it must be in the sterile heart of a world-hardened man.

Laurence frowned; but he tore the letter open, so soon as the servant had left the room, and he read:

"I had almost sworn never to address you again, after that last letter you sent. In that you bade me never to trouble you more; you told me that you would neither listen to me nor assist me, however sore my strait might be. I forget you were my brother when I read those words; the devil rose within me, and I had uttered—what hereafter it might have withered me to think of, only my wife came up to me, and looked in my face, and, God bless her, while her eyes rested on me, I could not speak, nor even think of what was hissing at my heart. I tell you this that you may judge what it cost me to write to you now. "I might starve," you said. Laurence Carr, since then I have learned what starvation is like—I have traveled very near its utmost brink; it is a word the meaning of which I *know*. That would not drag me one quarter inch towards your threshold, its worst agony is not within a twentieth part of that which even the thought of addressing you for help would have cost me. But that anguish is now swallowed in a greater. I seek your help—I entreat you, I beseech you to assist me. Laurence, we are brothers, the children of one mother; do not deny me. Give to me as you would to a beggar—fling me some money into the street. I care not how, so you do not be deaf to my cry—only be prompt, for Death is pitiless.

"Brother! God look on you as you hearken to me. *My child is dying for want of food.* I wait. "WILLIAM CARR."

Laurence rose from his gilded chair, and traversed the luxurious chamber wherein he had sate, stately and solitary. He opened the door—there he paused. Then, as if with new resolution, he stepped forth into the hall.

In a remote corner, which even the brilliant lamp failed clearly to illumine, he distinguished a tall, thin figure—a pale, pinched face, with grey hair falling tangled over the broad brow. Did Laurence see *then* the vision of the bright-haired child who slept on his breast one Christmas night long years back? Who can tell.

Howbeit, he retreated into the room before he was recognized, or even seen by his brother; and it was by a servant that he sent to William a small but heavy packet. He eagerly seized it, with a kind of smothered cry, almost like a sob, and the next instant had left his brother's house.

The child was saved; and then William had time to think on the sacrifice he had made to save it. His proud heart was torn at the remembrance that he had been a waiting petitioner in the hall of his brother's house, and had been received at the hands of his brother's lackey. He could not know that Laurence, hard man as he was, had tried to face him, but could not; that he had watched him as he darted away through the street, that he had thought of him often, since, with something almost approaching tenderness.

He did not know this: so he strove and toiled with desperate energy, till he could give back his brother's gold, and then returned with a brief acknowledgment. He added—"It is best for us both to forget our humiliation, for you degraded both in me. Let us be strangers again."

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The returned money found Laurence Carr a poor man. Sudden political troubles abroad, with their irretrievable consequences—two or three mistakes in home commercial policy—had wrought this great change, and he was bankrupt. A day—two or three hours in that day—saw the fall, saw the ruin to its climax. The merchant prince was worse than penniless; for there were large debts which all his vast possessions, all his accumulated wealth, would fail to satisfy. His wife, naturally incensed at his misfortunes, partook herself and her liberal jointure to the parental roof, and he remained alone to combat with ruin.

Then came out the finer part of his character. With courage he encountered the host of difficulties that crushed pressingly upon him. With scrupulous (some people called it Quixotic) integrity he gave up all he had, and quietly and simply announced his intention of paying off the residue of his debt to the uttermost farthing, if he lived. Then with proud, silent bravery he accepted a clerkship in some brother merchant's office, took a humble lodging, and began again the life he had commenced in his early youth.

The world—even the world of business and money getting—is not so wholly bad as we read of in novels. Laurence received many offers of assistance, and one or two good hearts persisted for a long time in following him with their active friendship. But he was not great enough to feel gratitude, or even to thoroughly appreciate their goodness. His pride was but the pride of a strong, bold, determined man. He disdained sympathy, and sullenly repulsed all proffered generosity.

The wheel of fortune had made a complete revolution. While depressing one brother, she elevated the other. William was growing into that *rara avis*, a flourishing author. He was sufficiently far from being wealthy, certainly, but he was at an equally safe distance from want. And now—oh, beware! Ye who hastily write resentment—he felt as though he would gladly return to his old poverty, if he could only recall the few lines he had sent a while since to his now ruined brother.

It was long before he dared to approach him with attempts at reconciliation. *He* felt keenly, with anguish, the fresh bitterness he had himself added to the former estrangement. If desperate then, it was surely hopeless now. Yet he tried. He wrote again and again, and his letters were returned with their seals unbroken. He laid in wait often, and essayed to speak to him—to grasp his hand. He was coldly thrust aside, without a word, without a look. He was always denied admittance at the door, when time after time he sought the poor abode where the former *millionaire* had his shelter.

One less tender, less patient than William, had been effectually repulsed with half the rebuffs he met with. But his exceeding love and yearning over his brother, besides the consciousness of having outraged that brother's pride, now that he has fallen from his high estate, smote him with an intense, sharp remorse. Only a *man* can wholly sympathize in a man's pride. William's own heart, different as it was, told him how great was the barrier he had set before them.

At length William and his wife bethought themselves of another plan. Their child, the girl, that Laurence's assistance had saved from death, was now grown into a fair damsel, of some fourteen years. She was like her father, with golden hair and brown eyes, such as he had.

"He cannot turn *her* from him," said the father and mother, as with glistening eyes they watched her on her way. She led her little brother by the hand, and these two presented themselves before Laurence, as he sat reading in the quiet sunshine of a Sabbath afternoon.

"We are Willie and Alice," said the girl, timidly, looking in his face.

He knew them at once, though his eyes had never rested on them before. Alice was his mother's name, and his mother's face seemed bent on him now, longing yearningly.

William and his wife were right—he could not turn her from him.

"Uncle won't you look at us?" said the pleading voice again; "won't you speak to us—me and little Willie?"

"Papa's own little Willie," chimed in the boy, inopportunely.

"Go home to your father," said Laurence, in a harsh, constrained voice, "I have nothing to say to you. Go home. I do not wish," he added in a soft tone, "to be unkind to you, but—but—you must leave me."

The girl stood drooping and tearful; the little boy gazed up at him with wondering eyes. He was fain to escape from them, and so passed from the room.

After that William grew hopeless. He had exhausted his stock of expedients; all his patience, endurance seemed in vain. He despaired of ever softening the obdurate heart.

Time passed on, and Laurence was untroubled by his brother. His persevering industry was working its own way, too, and he was already clear of the barren poverty he had at first experienced after his ruin. Each succeeding year found him advancing to ease again, if not to affluence; and he was stern, cold, and unbending as ever.

Another Christmastide drew near—forty-five years after that Christmas when the moon shone on the little white bed at Cheriton. It was Christmas eve, and Laurence had been detained late in the city, balancing some complexed accounts. It was past midnight as he wended his way homeward. It was a frosty night, and moonlight, and suburban streets were quiet and slumberous; Laurence's footsteps, echoing on the pavement, alone breaking the stillness. Somehow without his own will, almost in spite of it, indeed, his thought turned back to old times, and there arose before him a vision of the quaint house in the country, where his boyhood had been passed; the large rambling garden, the big mulberry tree, and the wood near the village where he and Willie had used to gather nuts. He and Willie—there he frowned, and sternly refused to dwell on the retrospection. He walked quickly on, with lips sturdily pressed and brows knitted, resolved to shut his mind on all softening influences, but he could not—the thoughts came again, and would not be repulsed. He lifted his eyes to the sky, and the myriad stars were shining down on him with a kind of smile—the same smile as that of long ago. He could not sleep that night. He lay very quiet, but with a world of busy thoughts flattering about his heart, striving for entrance. The moonlight streamed in through a crack in the blind, and it lit up the dreary, comfortless room. Laurence closed his eyes suddenly. The moonbeams brought a remembrance with them that he would not welcome.

There came a sound of music outside in the frosty street.

The waits. And they played the old, old tune two boys had listened to years ago at Cheriton.

Very strangely it sounded on Laurence's ears—strangest of all because it seemed so familiar. With a strange, irresistible power, the sweet, solemn tone smote on his closed heart, and even before he recognized it, he had yielded to its power, and, wondering the while, felt the hot tears bubbling thickly to his eyes.

And then came thronging the recollections of the olden days—vanished the intervening years like an obscuring smoke, leaving clear and vivid the memory of the happy, innocent time; when he was a boy, and Willie was his dear brother. The pleasant home, the kind father, and, gentlest thought of all, the mother who had been wont every night to hang over her boys in their little white bed, and lingeringly kiss them ere they went to sleep. How plainly he remembered all; the childish face with its golden curls; he opened his eyes, almost expecting to see it on the pillow beside him. Not the moonlight only fell on his own thin, wrinkled hand, worn and shriveled with the troubles and the cares of well nigh sixty years.

Prayerful thoughts, long strange to him, alas! came instinctively to his mind, and he heard, low and soft, but clear and blending with the music in the street, the voice of his mother, sounding as of old when she read to her little ones from the large Book on her knee. He heard solemn, slow, and sweet, the Divine words, "*And this commandment I leave with you, that ye love one another.*"

He saw the dear mother's eyes as they rested upon the boys with such an infinite yearning tenderness in their depths. He could tell *now*, what the earnest look meant. He could guess, too, something of what were her thoughts, when often in their childish quarrels she would draw close to her side, and then pass her arm round the strong, active, vigorous Laurence, whispering, "Don't be harsh with Willie; take care of Willie. Love each other always, my boys, my darlings."

The waits ceased—the air was silent—but there was music in the heart of Laurence Carr.

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Christmas day at Cheriton was drawing to its close. The evening bells were ringing, the stars shone in the dark colorless sky. The murmur of the waves beating on the shore came ever and anon—a quiet sound and happy.

Only two days before, William Carr had come to live at Cheriton in the old house. It was nothing altered, there were the same many paned windows, quaint corners, and gabled ends; the same surrounding domain of garden, with the grove of trees beyond, behind which the icy moon was rising even now.

At the bay window of the oak-paneled parlor sat William and his wife, with their two children, watching the pale light trembling between the branches of the glowing fire. The fire light flashed and glowed within the room, lighting up the pictures on the walls, the books, and prints, and drawings scattered on the table, and the graceful groups of winter flowers lavishly disposed as women love to have them—everywhere. Alice rested beside her father; his hands wandered among her bright curls; but he was looking towards the fir grove, and his thoughts had traveled back many, many years. His wife's eyes were fixed on his face; she could read the language of the sad wistful look; she knew how eloquently everything he saw spoke to his heart of the old happy childish days—tender, pathetic memories that she also loved so dearly for his sake. The children prattled gaily for some time, but at length their voices ceased; they were subdued into stillness by the unwonted gravity of their father. Never had they seen him so sorrowful, and they marveled in their innocent hearts; for he was happy, they knew, at coming back to Cheriton, to his old home. All the afternoon he had been pointing out to them his favorite haunts, his garden, his tree with the seat under it, and the little room where he used to sleep. He had been so smiling and glad *then*. What could make papa look grieved now?

Awed by the mystery, they gave their good night kiss with added tenderness, but silently; and silently followed their mother from the room. But she returned almost immediately, and stole softly behind the chair wherein her husband sat, still looking forth with that silent, longing, regretful look. Even when he felt her arm around his neck, he did not turn. But she spoke softly—

"Dearest, *I know*. But be comforted. It will be made right some day. Perhaps before another Christmas. God has been so good to us, he will not deny this one blessing you so crave, so pray for."

And William folded her to his heart, and smiled. Mary's voice never sounded in his ears but to create peace, or to add to content. When she left him again, the moonlight fell on his face, and showed it calm, hopeful and serene.

There came a heavy tread on the stone steps, leading to the entrance door, and then the great bell rang startlingly through the quiet house. William rose, and himself went to meet the intruder. Fairly, clearly, purely gleamed the moonlight in at the window; warm and generous glowed the fire, revealing the pleasant homelike aspect of the room.

So William threw back his gray hair from his brows—a boyish habit, continued ever since the time of golden curls, and went to the outer door, unbarred and opened it.

A gush of chill, sharp air, the sound of the sea, like a far-off chant; the moonbeams, white on the stone porch and pavement, and a dark figure standing motionless there; this was what William felt, and heard, and saw, the first moment.

The next, a face looked on him, a hand was stretched towards him, and a voice uttered only one word—

"Brother!"

William's joyful cry answered him; then, like Joseph of old, "he fell upon his neck, and wept."

And at the door where the two children had so often entered from their play, the two gray-haired men stood, the Christmas stars shining on their faces.